

*Jedeeny Senior*  
*Convocation 1985*

Some of you will remember that we have done something like this before. Approximately forty-four months ago, on August 27, 1981, many of you, much younger at that time, were seated in this building on a very warm morning. It was my pleasant duty to welcome you to the academic side of the University, to orient you toward the major task you would be engaged in for the next forty-four months. That is, I would make a valiant effort to orient you properly, before the upper-classmen would arrive and your actual orientation would commence. This time, as opposed to our first meeting, I am speaking at your invitation. It is a privilege, as it was the first time, and I thank you.

Often, when I am working with a student who is experiencing difficulties with his or her writing, I pass on a bit of advice I was given when I was a graduate student: write simply and directly. A pleasing style is not automatic, but your basic obligation is to be understood, to be clear. I shall follow that good advice today, and speak to you simply and directly. The few thoughts I wish to share with you are not original with me, but they are terribly important, and simple.

First, I wish to remind you of what I said to you on that warm morning almost four years ago. As one would expect, I offered a

description of U.D.'s self-understanding as a university. It seemed to me that such a short description, along with a public acknowledgement of our accountability to live up to that self-understanding, would serve to point you in the proper direction and impress you, to some extent, with the seriousness and depth of our commitment. Permit me to requote the words of Jacques Maritain, one who I identified at the time only as "a very learned philosopher," about our task. Maritain suggested that the "higher education" has the aim

. . . to guide man in the evolving dynamism through which he shapes himself as a human person--armed with knowledge, strength of judgment, and moral virtues--while at the same time conveying to him the spiritual heritage of the nation and the civilization in which it is involved, and preserving in this way the century-old achievements of generations. The utilitarian aspect of education--which enables the youth to get a job and make a living--must surely not be disregarded, for the children of man are not made for aristocratic leisure. But this practical aim is best provided by the general human capacities developed. And the ulterior specialized training which may be required must never imperil the essential aim of education.

It still seems to me that this is our basic commitment at this University. Of course, this is an abbreviated and skeletal-like statement, and the cultivation of the higher education demands further development of and reflection upon these few words. Yet, the dialogue of learning--within ourselves, with the past, and with each other--rests ultimately upon an acceptance of these limitations, limitations, though, that are, paradoxically, filled with an enormous potential for freedom.



Following up on Maritain's description, I continued my presentation to you in August 1981 with these words:

This is the fundamental attitude toward the higher education at the University of Dallas. The intention is for you and me to be confronted, especially in the core curriculum, with our accumulated western heritage. We read and think; we speak and write; we experiment; we strive for understanding. Most importantly, though, we are led again to the perennial questions of human existence: the nature and the end of man, the reality of truth and beauty, the existence of God and man's personal relationship with Him. At a true university, we must come, we must return, to these considerations and these questions through the informed use of our intellect and our spirit in the critical and sustained pursuit of knowledge. For a few moments, this University will be the setting for your "evolving dynamism" as you develop your capacity for wonder and love.

To reinforce the thrust of my remarks to you on that warm summer morning, I then repeated this same sentiment in another way:

The freedom and self-determination we must be seeking is ordered initially by our commitment to the real and strenuous exercise of our intellectual faculties upon our collective experience in history. Learning and knowledge are good. And yet our center of learning seemingly recognizes more, intends more: we speak of a quest for wisdom and virtue. But, can wisdom and virtue be merely learned intellectually? Can we each memorize wisdom and regurgitate virtue? And what of these words of that same philosopher: 'the main point is surely to be a good man rather than a learned man?' Do I now stand before you as a closet anti-intellectual? What do I mean here, then?

Certainly I am not saying that the learned man cannot be a good man, or that a good man cannot be a learned man. What I am saying is that mere learning and mere knowledge are important, but

not enough. Information is not enough. And we say this out loud. We confront you with these sentiments. We cannot make you wise and we cannot make you virtuous. But the Catholic nature of the University of Dallas, as well as its place in the Western tradition, demand not only academic excellence, but demand also an awareness of the excellence of the spirit, the excellence of the truly wise and virtuous soul. Again, we can give you neither wisdom nor virtue, but we can challenge you to learn, to think in a truly critical and independent way; we can challenge you to become truly human by challenging you to know that in all humility you are called to go beyond mere knowledge.

And finally, I summed up my presentation in this manner:

This, then, is why I think the University of Dallas is indeed a special place, a significant and important center of learning. You students come to us and make a very real act of faith: you judge us to be competent in what we say we do; you accept our educational ideal. Thus, you challenge us to be accountable. And we, the faculty and administration, challenge ourselves to remain ever faithful to a truly liberating burden.

Obviously, I did try to create a mood or at least introduce a particular tone at the beginning of your few short years with us. Embedded in my prose, though, were two other purposes.

One is quite apparent: the U.D. experience ought to be irritating in a very fundamental way. The intellectual life, on either side of the podium is a most difficult--and exasperating--way of life. The real life of the mind does take courage and hard, sustained work. It does require a great stamina and a capacity to live with the irritations of high expectation and failure, as well as success and fulfillment. It is an exhilarating and frustrating life. And a most important life. On

the other hand, I know of no university in this land that advertises its own non-commitment to the cultivation of the intellect. But "in an age of conformity and mindless materialism," ours, and we know ourselves best, is a genuine and durable commitment to an ideal which is spoken of more than practiced in many places. In part, I think, our own brand of intra-university bickering proceeds from a strong desire to practice what we preach, and a concurrent realization that we have much more to do in meeting the challenge we set for ourselves. Hence, I wanted in 1981 to suggest the significance of our announced end, but also to counsel an appreciation of the unsettled and unsettling nature of the endeavor.

There was a second purpose. And, there is a second purpose.

During the last few years, a primary topic of conversation at U.D. has been the Catholic nature of the institution and, for example, of the core curriculum. The perennial realities of faith and reason, and their relationship in an American university setting, have attained more prominence. This is as it should be; the dialogue must continue. We shall all be the beneficiaries in such a venture approached with intellectual expertise, honesty, and good will. There is another dimension to this aspect of our common enterprise at U.D., a more personal dimension. It is necessary, to complete our task, to be aware of "the excellence of the spirit, the excellence of the truly wise and virtuous soul." To be aware of Maritain's good men and good women. We are obligated to try to become good men and good women. The University cannot make good men and good women; it can recognize that this is the ultimate goal of each and every one of us.



Let me illustrate this very clearly and simply, and specifically. Recently, Dr. Sasseen delivered an address in which he touched directly on the Catholic nature of the University of Dallas. In the midst of his presentation, he indicated that we ought in some essential way to be a Catholic institution. In his own words, "Somehow our Catholic faith must penetrate our activity--form, inform, perhaps transform what we are and what we do." Again, within the past month, at a meeting of the core review sub-committee on the Catholic nature of the core curriculum, a significant preliminary agreement was reached. Faculty members, seeking to become accomplished teachers and productive scholars, can demonstrate within their own lives the possibility in the modern era of a legitimate, and fruitful, coexistence of reason and faith. By their very example, the false opposition between faith and reason can be set aside and, as our faculty handbook states so forthrightly

The Catholic nature of our University thus indicates not a restriction but a positive task. Part of the task is the development of a philosophic and religious view of man, one that permeates the entire curriculum without violating either the proper autonomy of each of the arts and sciences or the religious freedom of faculty and students.

Thus: somehow we ought to show the faith--we can be examples--we are to develop a view . . . . Nice words, but the obvious rejoinder is--how? How to combine in some way the primary reality of the higher education with the recognition of a higher reality; the gentle and sincere welcome of non-Catholics and the essential working-out of a Catholic University's self-proclaimed, particular reason for existence?

An answer is, of course, quite simple, yet profound and troublesome. It can be found in many places but perhaps a singularly appropriate phrasing for us was made in the early 17th century by St. Robert Bellarmine. He wrote

Wisdom and eloquence without charity are dead  
and profitless, but charity without wisdom  
and eloquence is like a brave man unarmed.

How very odd it may seem at times, to combine our learning--our wisdom and eloquence--with charity, with love. Such thoughts may seem somehow outmoded, surely unsophisticated. And yet, to love one another in an imperfect world, whether the world of U.D. or the so-called "real world," this it seems to me is an answer very simple, very direct, and very hard.

And now you leave us. For a brief "few moments," for only forty-four months, this institution was the setting for "the evolving dynamism" of your personal growth. It was the setting for your initiation into the philosophic and the scientific and for the development of "your capacity for wonder and love." Maintain and reflect upon the joining together of learnedness and love, a robust and critical and thoughtful learning; a selfless love taking ultimate direction and inspiration from the selflessness and extraordinary love freely given to us by means of a wooden Cross. Now, you too are accountable and able to be challenged. We shall miss each other.

*Thomas W. Jodyewicz*

Convocation of the Senior  
Class of 1985, May 9, 1985